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## **ART AS AN IMITATION OF REALITY: A CRITICAL INQUIRY OF “DYSTOPIAN FICTION” IN THE LIGHT OF COVID-19**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present paper demystifies the dystopian world that coronavirus highlighted by expanding its wings all over the planet. The paper intends to unveil the poignant plight of mankind that was forced to kneel in front of the micro-monster who was capable enough to send millions of people to their final destinations. It transferred millions of people from their homes to hospitals and hospitals to cemeteries, causing thousands of labor class to agonize by starvation. Through the help of a few fictional novels like *The Animal Farm* and *The Clockwork Orange*, I would try to delineate the fact that art imitates reality and vice-e-versa.

**Keywords:** *Dystopia, COVID-19, Totalitarianism, Fact vs. Fiction.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1: 26).

Scholars have offered a wide variety of explanations for the belief, mentioned above in the excerpt from Genesis. The most acceptable explanation delineates that God had created mankind in his own image who would be privileged with a certain kind of intellect that animals or other creatures would be denied. In other words, a human would possess the capacity for reason, language, morality, personality, and purpose.

“Humanism” is also a philosophical stance in the literature that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings. It views humans as solely responsible for the promotion of the entire world as they are capable of leading it with its inventions and innovations. Considering today’s digital age, one can assert about the advancement of civilization but an imperative question arises: Who had got benefitted from this modernization except for human beings? What benefit did it grant to the lives of animals and other creatures? Instead, it is proliferating their mortality rates with more innovation of non-vegetarian recipes. The COVID -19 crisis was one such result generated by such innovations which emerged from a “bat soup” that had cordially been served in the restaurants of China. It forced the entire world to kneel in front of the micro-monster who was capable enough to send millions of people to their final destinations. It transferred millions of people from their homes to hospitals and hospitals to cemeteries, causing thousands of labor class to agonize by starvation. It didn’t discriminate against any being whether rich or poor, male or female, black or white. Here, the hypothetical question arises: Is it really the corona virus that is causing severe damage to the species of humans, or: Is it any natural calamity that had fallen heavily on mankind?

Thomas Loren Friedman, an American author and a columnist for *The New York Times*, has aptly said that “COVID-19 is a black elephant. It is the logical outcome of our increasingly destructive wars against nature”. The mentioned comment indicates the dystopian world whose seeds mankind had planted decades ago and as a result, they are getting thorns in the form of crises like Corona. One can assert that the modern period is nothing but a world where there is a dawn of dystopia and dusk of humanity. With time, we’re slowly approaching that dystopian world that is no more limited to any fiction or genre of literature but it is turning into a reality day by day.

The dystopian fictions usually depict an imperfect world, where everything goes terribly wrong as it shows us a nightmarish about what might happen to the world in near future. The COVID-19 crisis didn’t seem different from any dystopian world. It delineated a world full of chaos where everything seems to be disrupted by the ill deeds of mankind. By the incident of Kerala, where some localities fed an explosive pineapple (filled with firecrackers) to a pregnant elephant which led to her death, one can assume that dystopian fictions like *Animal Farm* by George Orwell is not distant from reality.

*Animal Farm* is one such quintessential example that fictionalized the world where animals believed in the concept of equality and democracy. Throughout the novel, they seemed to be in continuous conflict with mankind. They fought and risked their lives for the sake of democracy and survival. And considering the brutalities of humans against animals or nature, we can only hope for Orwell’s fiction not to turn into a reality because then dictatorship would prevail in every species of earth and the planet would no longer be left for the human species to survive.

The pandemic crisis was predicted in the pages of dystopian novels long ago which had been well said by Oscar Wilde in one of his essays, *The Decay of Lying*. He said that “Life imitates art far more than arts imitate life” and Bruce Willis, an American actor, and producer later added “Arts imitates life and, sometimes, life imitates art. It’s a weird combination of elements.” I believe that the crisis through which we all had suffered is enough to comprehend these statements as the art or fiction is turning into reality.

The novel, *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens is also a novel with dystopian elements that depict the vulnerable part of society characterized by poverty, denial, and oppression. It shows the exploitation of the working class at the hands of political and economic elites. Stephen Blackpool, (a character in the novel) is a quintessential example who is one of the “Hands” in Bounderby’s factory, Stephen lives a life of drudgery and poverty. Despite the hardships of his daily toil, Stephen strives to maintain his honesty, integrity, faith, and compassion. But an elite spoiled brat frames Stephen into a bank robbery of which he, himself was a perpetrator. Stephen dies tragically at the end of the story tired of being exploited by elites. The COVID-19 crisis delineated the same exploitation of poor working-class people who lost their lives at the hands of elites. Wealthy travelers brought the disease into poor countries bringing death to thousands of poor people having bad sanitation facilities. Rich people still have ways to survive as they can quarantine themselves in their huge bungalows, they can afford all the hospital expenses, and can have healthy food to survive but the pandemic once knocks at the poor’s door, it ends up taking several of lives with it. Friedrich Engels once pointed out that

“The poor districts in which the workers are crowded together are the breeding places of all those epidemics which from time to time afflict out towns. Cholera, typhus, typhoid fever, smallpox and other ravaging diseases spared their germs in the pestilential air and the poisoned water of these working-class quarters”.

The above statement itself unleashes the lives of the poor and the migrant workers of all countries including India who are facing unimaginable difficulties and becoming victims of the COVID-19 pandemic. And the piteous fact is, even if the vaccine gets produced, it would still be unapproachable to the poor because of its extortionate prices.

Another face of dystopia had also been seen in hospitals where many poor were denied proper hospitality. They were being treated merely because they had turned into carriers who could spread the disease and could cause the country and its economy a great loss. The pandemic had at least unleashed the diabolical nature of human beings of every segment. In India, hospitals were filled with a few barbarians who attacked their own saviors, the doctors and nurses. Some attacked police forces who performed their duties amid the crisis carrying the danger of the pandemic on their palms. It reminds me of Anthony Burgess’s novel *The Clockwork Orange*, another dystopian fiction that represents the current vicious generation that seems to be programmed to do evil.

The novel begins with a 15-year-old boy, Alex, who finds a thrill in tormenting other people around him. One day on his way home, Alex with his friends assault a scholar, and rob a store leaving the owner and his wife bloodied and unconscious. They beat up a beggar, stole a car, starts their ride to the countryside, and break into a cottage where they terrorise a young man and rape his wife. The fictional generation in the novel doesn’t seem to be alien to the current generation where Corona patients don’t hesitate even to molest the nurses who are sacrificing their lives in order to treat them.

So, I believe that it would be an injustice to blame COVID-19 solely, for the abominable condition as the pandemic is only one among the results of our vicious activities. Apart from this crisis, there are many immoral acts done on the daily basis by mankind which is gradually turning the fictional world of Dystopia into reality. So, the only vaccine against the dystopian world can be our empathy, kindness, and virtuous intellect through which we can lead the world in the right direction.

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